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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
16 April 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Political Situation in South Vietnam
(As of 12:00 Noon)

1. Two Buddhist sources have told the Embassy that Tri Quang will go to central Vietnam, either today or tomorrow, to try to calm the situation there. Both appeared somewhat pessimistic over the prospects of the mission.

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2. An unconfirmed report of the French Press Agency (AFP) alleges that the government today prevented the departure for I Corps of a three-man Buddhist delegation including Tri Quang. AFP speculates that the government, mindful of experience with General Thi, was reluctant to allow Quang to return to the troubled northern area. The story also indicates that Thich Thien Minh, a Quang follower, has hinted that this could change the present Buddhist attitude toward cooperation.

3. Antigovernment elements in I Corps continue to voice distrust of the Ky government and to imply that they will continue to press for its replacement. Some 2,000-3,000 demonstrators in Da Nang today reportedly burning a mock copy of the government's election decree. General Thi reportedly witnessed the brief demonstration, but did not take part. According to Embassy information, Thi claims that he will return to Hue today, and that he is in

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Da Nang only to clear out the I Corps headquarters and residence for his newest successor General Dinh. Thi's comments to the press yesterday about the need for government change were reportedly off the cuff, and the Embassy considers it possible that he did not then know of the Buddhist Institute's action suspending the campaign in Saigon.

4. Hue was quiet today except for a brief gathering of some 1,000 civil servants called out by "struggle forces" leaders. The Hue radio continues to oppose any compromise with Saigon, and is broadcasting claims of student leaders that Thich Thien Minh, in Saigon, is urging them to continue to "struggle."

5. The only reported incident in Saigon was the shooting of Chu Van Binh, the editor and publisher of the Vietnamese newspaper Song, which had had its offices sacked last week by hoodlums after it had criticized the disorderly tactics of Buddhist militants. Late reports indicate that the editor, whose pen name is Chu Tu, was not killed as first believed, but is in a critical condition. His youthful assailant escaped and his identity is unknown. The Embassy believes that the act would have been perpetrated by almost any faction since the paper had been critical of the Buddhists, Catholics, government, and Viet Cong, but that it may in any event have unfortunate repercussions.

6. Dr. Phan Quang Dan, president of the recent National Political Congress, and La Thanh Nghe, the congress vice-president, have confirmed that tentative agreement was reached yesterday with Premier Ky on procedures for setting up a committee to supervise elections for a constituent assembly. The committee, which will also advise on the drafting of election laws, will have 30 members, one-half of them selected by the provincial and municipal councils in each corps area, and the other half to consist of experts and representatives of religious and political groups. There will be another larger committee, also representative of both the local councils and other groups, to review the election regulations. Currently, it appears that the election date is being set for mid-August.

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7. In an assessment of the present situation, Ambassador Lodge observes that the situation is now calmer than it has been for many weeks, but is still dangerous and explosive, particularly in I Corps. He believes that the political congress put the government in a more favorable position than might have been hoped for, and that the Buddhists have been forced to recognize certain weaknesses in their position, although they may yet upset arrangements. Lodge sees as the major trouble areas ahead the restoration of control in I Corps, the question of authority in the transitional period prior to a permanent government, and the future position of the military, including not only strains within the Directorate, but the younger military officers who are on the verge of revolt against civilian political ambitions.

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